

Changes for African American Education

Despite the differing opinions expressed regarding African American education, Wilmington boasted some of the best educational options for blacks in North Carolina. The city was home to a series of well established public and private institutions for both primary and secondary learning. Many of the city's graduates moved to universities and colleges elsewhere in the state and nation.⁷⁹

Progressive educator and county school superintendent, M. C. S. Noble left the city in 1898. His departure was a setback for the city's educational system. While in Wilmington, Noble, a graduate of the University of North Carolina, proved himself to be a man of great insight and an advocate of equality in education. He left Wilmington in 1898 and moved back to Chapel Hill to become a professor. Noble understood that the education of whites and blacks should parallel each other. He thought that if whites were shown that blacks could be well educated and could use their education for the benefit of society, relationships would improve over time. He argued that Orange County should fund a black educational institute "in the shadow" of UNC because "a good, practical, successful school right before their [white students at UNC] eyes from day to day [would] be a compelling argument for negro education which [would] bear fruit when these students [took] their place as men in the public affairs of the state."⁸⁰ Noble

envisioned a school that would combine practical skills education, such as carpentry and trades, with literary studies. Noble's ideal school was loosely tied to the model proposed by many educators who applauded the success of the Tuskegee Institute. As a result, African American schools began to focus on trades and the goal of producing better workers.⁸¹

Analysis of the impact of the 1898 campaign and violence on schools in Wilmington and New Hanover County is difficult because many records have been destroyed over time. However, the minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners and the records of the State Department of Public Instruction document spending for schools before and after the violence of November 1898. Better teacher pay encouraged the recruitment and retention of good teachers; low teacher pay resulted in lower teacher recruitment standards. Low

education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Noble apparently made the early start on his career as a result of the progressive nature of his work in Wilmington. Despite his progressive steps in the city school system, Wilmington's black students still suffered financial setbacks and reflected a larger problem for black education statewide. M. C. S. Noble, *A History of the Public Schools of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930).

⁸¹ Leloudis explained that the vocational curricula of Booker T. Washington's highly successful Tuskegee Institute offered white educators an option for improving black educational programs. Training blacks to be good workers in trades and agriculture became a major focus designed to address what whites perceived as the needs and desires of blacks. "Industrial education promised to cultivate a new sense of self and social place among African American school children, convincing them to accept their subordination as a normal and inevitable fact of life." Aiding in the development of vocational training was the arrival of Jeannes teachers in the first decades of the 20th century. Funded by a northern philanthropist, Jeannes teachers traveled the state and taught students and teachers on a variety of topics. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 148, 182, 184-185.

⁷⁹ For more on Wilmington's educational system, see Appendix E.

⁸⁰ M. C. S. Noble as quoted by James Leloudis in *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996), 200. It is interesting to note that Noble, in writing the history of public education in North Carolina, failed to mention the growth of Wilmington's schools when discussing the progressive nature of statewide